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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [SCUL](#) [PREL](#) [LH](#)
SUBJECT: JEWISH ISSUES UPDATE: RESTITUTION STALLED, SLOW
PROGRESS ON CEMETERY, ANTI-NAZI PARTISANS INVESTIGATED,
UPTICK IN ANTI-SEMITIC INCIDENTS

REF: VILNIUS 354 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador John A. Cloud for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d)

11. (C) Summary. Lithuania continues to struggle with the legacy of the Holocaust and how to honor its once vibrant Jewish heritage. More than four years after joining NATO, Lithuania has yet to reconstitute Jewish communal property in any meaningful way and there are no signs of moving forward. After two years of delays, there are signs of slow progress regarding the protection of an historic Jewish cemetery that has been threatened by development, though the issue is far from resolved and delays continue. The Prosecutor's office continues to move forward with investigations of anti-Nazi partisans based on minimal evidence. Since January 2007, there has been a sharp increase in anti-Semitic and other racist incidents with only lukewarm efforts by GOL officials to condemn such acts. End summary.

Restitution: Promises, Promises

12. (C) The GOL has told Post and Jewish groups prior to each of the last four legislative sessions (dating to October 2006) that it would introduce legislation on Jewish communal property restitution in the upcoming session. The legislation has never been introduced. Local and international Jewish partners, including the Lithuanian Jewish Community, the World Jewish Restitution Organization, the American Joint Distribution Committee, and the American Jewish Committee (AJC), have worked on this issue with the GOL for years in good faith. However, their patience has worn thin. An AJC official has told us that, unless there is real progress soon, a wide range of Jewish organizations will take the issue public. This will involve media attention and a call for a boycott of the "Vilnius: Cultural Capital of Europe 2009" events. Currently, Jewish groups are trying to convince the President's office to introduce legislation because they have given up on the Government doing so.

Cemetery: Slow Progress after Three Years of Blunders

13. (U) Since 2006, American and international Jewish groups have been outraged at the GOL's handling of development at or near an old and venerated Jewish cemetery in the Snipiskes neighborhood of Vilnius.

14. (C) After two years of delays, the GOL took its first concrete step to protect the cemetery on April 8 (reftel). The Council on Immovable Properties declared the cemetery a cultural heritage site, which gives it some legal protections. These protections, however, are not comprehensive and can be turned back if the Ministry of Culture's Cultural Heritage Department grants permission to build on the site. This loophole is significant in light of

the fact that it was the Cultural Heritage Department that gave approval for the construction of the second building in the office complex in February 2007. Moreover, the land under the current development and under the existing Sports Palace arena is not included in the designation because, the Council reasoned, the extensive excavations for these buildings already removed any remains of the cemetery. The GOL will begin a geophysical and archeological study on June 25 in cooperation with an Israeli geotechnical consultant, Arie Klein, and the London-based Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe. After squabbles over language that gave the GOL absolute authority to halt the study at anytime, the GOL and Klein signed the contracts for the study on June 12, minus the "veto" language. Results of the study should be ready by mid-August.

15. (U) A different private developer, Ukio Bank Investment Group (UBIG), part of Vladimir Romanov's business empire, presented its plan to develop a 13-hectare site that includes the entire cemetery area, except the area of the current construction of the King Mindaugas Apartments (reftel). The developers told us on June 5 that they are waiting for the results of the upcoming geophysical study and will agree to protect whatever boundaries are accepted by that study.

War Criminals and Double Standards

16. (C) Many Jewish groups believe the GOL has a double standard for prosecution of war criminals. These groups believe that anti-Nazi, Jewish-Lithuanian partisans are investigated based on the flimsiest evidence, but the Prosecutor's office pays only cursory attention to mountains of evidence that could lead to conviction of many ethnic Lithuanian Nazi collaborators. Efraim Zuroff, director of Israel's Simon Wiesenthal Center, is the most vocal critic, but representatives of Jewish groups such as the American Joint Distribution Committee maintain this as well in private conversations with us. The American Jewish Committee and B'nai B'rith have expressed their concern about the case of Yitzhak Arad (details below) in a letter to the GOL.

17. (U) While the Prosecutor's office has been lackluster in investigating Nazi collaborators, it has been actively pursuing investigations into several anti-Nazi, Jewish partisans. The most prominent case involves Yitzhak Arad, an anti-Nazi partisan who was born in Lithuania and moved to Palestine in 1945. He later became a brigadier general in the Israeli Defense Forces and was director of Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust Remembrance Authority, for 21 years (1972-1993). He was also a member of Lithuania's International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes. The Lithuanian Prosecutor's office began an investigation into Arad in May 2006, allegedly based upon something Arad himself wrote in his book *The Partisan* over thirty years ago. The Prosecutor's office has said publicly that Arad, as a partisan in service of the Soviet NKVD (precursor to the KGB), may have conducted crimes against humanity, including killing civilians and prisoners of war. The case has caused an uproar in the international Jewish community and led to Arad's resignation from the International Commission, the resignation of another member of the Commission (Martin Gilbert), and the suspension of meetings of the Commission as a sign of protest by the Commission's director, MP Emmanuelis Zingeris.

18. (C) Several other Jewish anti-Nazi partisans are under investigation, including Fania Brantsovsky. The "evidence" against Brantsovsky appears to be based on a statement in a book of memoirs by one of Brantsovsky's co-partisans, Rachel Margolis, that places Brantsovsky at a partisan attack on the village of Koniuchy (now Kaniukai) in January 1944. Brantsovsky has said she was not at Koniuchy during the attack.

Tepid Reaction to an Increase in Anti-Semitism and racism

¶9. (U) On March 11, Lithuania's independence day, a group of approximately 200 skinheads marched (without a permit) on Gedimino Avenue, Vilnius's main shopping boulevard, shouting slogans that included anti-Semitic chants. The march has become an annual tradition, at least three years running. This year was widely covered in the media, including the fact that although police were present, they only ushered the skinheads onto the sidewalk and allowed the march to proceed.

A multitude of other racist and anti-Semitic events have occurred since, including the burning of a wooden Holocaust memorial, vandalism of the Jewish Community Center in Klaipeda, other vandalism and the display of a Nazi flag in Klaipeda, anti-Semitic articles in the second-tier daily Lietuvos Aidas, and vandalism involving swastikas in Vilnius (septel). The GOL response has been slow in nearly all cases and absent in many, despite Post's frequent discussions with GOL officials about the importance of immediate and clear condemnations when anti-Semitic and racist acts occur. After the skinhead march, one member of the Vilnius city council, former mayor Arturas Zuokas, condemned it immediately. The Prime Minister condemned it on March 18 (one week after the march) and the President condemned it on March 20. On June 17, a Vilnius court fined two participants in the rally 1300 Litas (590 USD) and one participant 2990 Litas (1360 USD) for incitement of hatred.

Comment

¶10. (C) Since accession to NATO, the GOL has shown its commitment to solving its "Jewish issues" to be limited, at best. The GOL is uninterested to begin with and allows itself to be paralyzed by a xenophobic electorate, a nationalist right wing, and disobedient lower level officials. It does not take the opportunity to use these issues to educate the Lithuanian public and garner positive attention on the international stage. Even when top officials tell lower ranking officials to take action, it does not always happen. On several occasions when PM Kirkilas has instructed his Ministry of Culture to take action regarding the Snipiskes cemetery, his orders were ignored or ineffectively implemented.

¶11. (C) In our regular conversations with international Jewish groups, we sense their increasing distrust of the GOL. Even signs of progress are viewed with cynicism.

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